Munitions in Canada

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AN ADDRESS

delivered by

Mr. J. W. FLAVELLE

Chairman, Imperial Munitions Board

OTTAWA CANADIAN CLUB

Chateau Laurier, December 16th, 1916

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ADDRESS

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MR. J. W. FLAVELLE

DECEMBER 16TH, 1916

MR. PRESIDENT AND GENTLEMEN,—

The Board with which I have the honour to be associated is responsible to the Minister of Munitions in Great Britain. The Government of Canada is not responsible for any of our acts and does not seek to interfere with our freedom. We have from the first been under a debt of obligation, over and over again renewed, to the Prime Minister for consistent support, for counsel at all times and for such help as we might ask him to render us. We have been under obligation to the Minister of Finance and to the bankers who worked in association with him, for the invaluable service which has been rendered in the assistance given in payment of munitions produced in this country.

The Board conceived that its first duty was to seek to organize so that the work committed to its care should be efficiently performed. We believed that the sound way to gather more business was to do the business already committed to our care well; and it is a satisfaction to be able to say that the Minister and those associated with him have indicated that they have confidence in what has been done, and that they think Canada, as well as the Board, has served them a very good turn. (Applause).

The extent of our organization, the character of our work, and the number of people who are serving us, will occasion surprise. We have in the head office, in Ottawa, a staff of six hundred odd men and women, and we have, scattered over the

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Dominion, a staff of over four thousand inspectors. I would like to say that no body of men charged with serious duty ever received more generous, more loyal, more efficient support than has been accorded to this Board by the members of the staff at the head office. Night and day, Saturday and Sunday, without regard to personal inconvenience or to physical weariness, they have lent themselves devotedly and unreservedly and continuously to the duties which were placed upon us. (Applause).

I would like to pay tribute to men—business men, professional men, leaders in great corporations—who either themselves, when they were asked, gave up their duties and came here, or who loaned their most efficient servants that they might serve us; and when I met the members of the staff, the representative members, the other night, and these business men who had volunteered for service so generously, I felt it was worth while. I believe if this Board were today to telegraph to each city in the Dominion and ask for a dozen of the ablest men in the city, I believe the common reply by wire would be—"I will be down on the next train." (Applause).

Perhaps I can illustrate to you the volume of business carried on if I say that the amount of money which we expend annually under the direct control of the Board, is more than two and a half times greater than the expenditures made in a normal year by the Government of Canada. And I would like to say to you as a matter of—I don't think pride, but as a matter of great satisfaction,—that when the officers sent from England by the British Auditor-General to go over our books left for England last week, after having been here for two months, they indicated, they found the records wholly satisfactory. (Applause).

You may be interested in learning of the manner in which this great business is carried on. Unlike the United States, where the large corporations who are given orders for munitions undertake to furnish a complete article, whether it is a complete empty shell or a complete finished shell, with or without fuze, we in this country place orders with small establishments in every province in the Dominion with the exception of yours, Sir Louis (Sir Louis Davies), where the people are engaged practically exclusively

in agricultural pursuits. We crossed the Channel into Newfoundland, and we have almost 4,500 miles from the first factory in the East to the last factory on the Pacific Coast. We have six hundred odd establishments working for us. We have between 200 and 250 for which we are directly responsible to supply with raw product, and these factories, as far apart as four thousand miles, separated by all the physical conditions incident to the weather in this country, are absolutely dependent upon the good sense, the judgment and the capacity of this Board to supply them with the raw product which will keep them going day by day. We purchase steel and ship it 1000, 1500 and 2000 miles to have it forged. We ship it from the forging plants back again five or six hundred miles, or forward two thousand miles to machining plants. We purchase the other component parts of the shells from manufacturers as far South as Florida and as far East as the United States or Canada carries you. We gather these parts and send them to remote points, and every manufacturer from ocean to ocean manufacturing and assembling shells is dependent upon what we may accomplish in delivering these forgings and components that they may keep up sustained deliveries of finished shells.

We are in the peculiar position of being under obligation to deliver these products necessary for war, and which we have undertaken to deliver at a stated time, and yet we have absolutely no authority over any one of the plants wherein the work is being done, with the exception of the fuse plant which my friend Gordon so efficiently organized in Montreal. Failure on the part of railways to move the components, failure on the part of steel plants to produce the product, failure in any one of the various plants to produce the materials required for shipment to the remote point means disappointment, means delay, means sometimes at the head office seven or eight hundred telegrams, many of them so hot that you would think they would burn the wire while they are in transit.

The Board has considered they were trustees for the Imperial authorities, hence in carrying on this business they adopted the simple principle in awarding contracts that no patronage, no favours, no consideration of personal or family, or social or party

or church interests would govern. (Applause.) After the struggle of the first few weeks the men who sought contracts and the men who thought that they should have them came to realize that there was no favour in connection with the work and administration of the Board. There was general acceptance of the situation, and we have had the satisfaction of carrying on our work in accordance with the above principle. (Hear, hear.)

May I here raise a question and ask you as men who must consider things that will happen after the war to query whether in any respect the accident which led to the formation of a Board in Canada to administer on behalf of another Government a great trust, affords an illustration that may be of value to the student who is considering after-war conditions and the relations between various parts of the Empire? For I presume there will be agreement on all sides that, however excellently we have been served by the rather nondescript character of our relations within the Empire, it is inconceivable that we shall go on without some change in the existing condition when the war is over. (Applause.) May I suggest to you who will give consideration to such matters that here is a body of men charged with the duty of administering for a Government across the sea a business requiring a greater expenditure in the country in which they are placed than the expenditure for maintenance of the Government in the country itself, and that there has been no friction nor misunderstanding with the Government of the country, or irregularity in relation to any of the operations that have been carried on. It is possible that if the Government of Great Britain was truly an Imperial Government, the administration of overseas business on its behalf may be illustrated to some extent by what has been happening during this past year under the administration of this Board.

May I say a word as to manufacturers? My friends of the press, who are always looking for copy that will make a good headline, sometimes, without intending to mislead, give emphasis to some part of a statement which, separated from its collateral matter, leaves a wrong impression. May I say to you, the work which has been accomplished by this Board could only have been done through the co-operation of the manufacturers of the

country. There is no room for scolding, for fault-finding, for bitterness or misunderstanding between the Board and the manufacturers of this country, and there *is* none. (Applause.) You will realize that in the shells which we are producing there is no law of average governing quality. Every shell that is made has to be sufficient in itself for the duty which it has to perform. You may have 999 shells excellently made, and if the one thousandth shell has been treated in such a manner that a "premature" takes place, which may destroy the gun and the crew, or which, because of shortage in distance, may destroy some of your own men, the fact that 999 were right will not relieve you from the penalty of the thousandth shell, and what I attempted to say in Toronto the other day was that I had seen in a great bonded warehouse where shells are inspected and passed upon when there is suspicion concerning them, I had seen shells from Canada which would not have left the shop of the manufacturer if there had been proper shop inspection; and I was surprised to see the headline in the paper the next day, "The Shells from Canada are a Failure." I could have told my newspaper friend, if he had asked me, that in the same bonded warehouse I saw shells from English factories and from United States factories, as well as from Canadian factories. That is to say, you will never get away from the element of human weakness. You can never entirely exclude the human quality, and shells will pass first shop inspection and afterwards Government inspection and will be faulty. Men are killed at the Front because of them; men do die that should not die, because of these faults. The moral that I sought to point, which the manufacturers who were present will bear out, was that there was no average which was satisfactory, but that as far as human judgment and wisdom and effort could assist each manufacturer must seek to produce shells free from faults. I would like to say on behalf of the manufacturers, what may surprise you in the form in which Mr. McKenna stated it the other day when he was speaking at a lunch which was given in honour of the Hon. Mr. White; he said, "Who would have supposed that Canada should have sent to the Front, or have in process of training to go to the Front, more men than we sent altogether to South Africa in a struggle in which we thought we

had tested the strength of the Empire? Or who would have dreamed that Canada would have produced more munitions than any country in the world except Germany *prior* to the war?"

You have no idea—it is not proper for me to discuss it here in detail—you have no idea, and I am sorry to say, neither has the manufacturer any adequate idea of the importance of the volume of munitions which are produced in Canada for the vital work which has to be done at the Front. The total percentage of shells produced in Canada in relation to all the shells used at the British Front is a percentage so large that I would amaze some of you if I were at liberty to express the figures, and when you read, and well-intentioned perhaps, in newspapers, or elsewhere, a comment that we send men to the Front and we do not equip them with munitions, and thereby the Government or somebody else is culpable, it is said with a wholly mistaken knowledge of the facts of the case, and without an understanding of the importance of the supply which comes from Canada. I would not be true, however, to the responsibility which I bear to the Board with which I am associated, or to you as representative men in Canada, or to the men in the trenches, if I did not say to the manufacturer when he has failed to make shipments in accordance with his promise that his failure is so grave a matter that he ought not to be able to sleep if he has not made every arrangement in his power whereby the promised production is made available for use at the Front. The question he must answer is not "Can I make money?" but "Will I live up to my promises?" To whatever extent you have had the idea that we were an amiable second, and that the munitions which we were sending forward did not make a great deal of difference—it was a good thing that Canada had the chance, but failure in delivery did not make a great deal of difference—is wholly wrong. Every failure on the part of the Canadian workman to work as many hours as he is able to work, every failure on the part of the Canadian manufacturer to plan and lay out his work whereby he will deliver that which he has promised to deliver, is a crime against the state. We have pledged our honour, we have pledged our energy, we have pledged our resources, and we have done it after conference with manufacturers, and both they and their

people have taken a responsibility before Almighty God and this state. In any failure to fulfil their promises that could have been accomplished if they had been more diligent they have taken a responsibility for which God forgive them!

We believed that delayed deliveries upon contracts belonging to the early business should be paid for at a reduced price. Of course you cannot review a lot of contracts that were let at a high price and upon which satisfactory deliveries had not been made, and undertake to reduce the price for the later delivery, without somebody feeling badly. We asked the manufacturers holding these contracts to come to Ottawa when we said—"This price was given for prompt delivery. Months have gone by, it is long past the time for the completion of the contract, and there has been either no delivery or greatly delayed delivery. Under these circumstances, what is fair to the Crown? You do not want the Crown to pay for something it did not get. What is the decent thing to do?" And I would like to say this for my fellow-manufacturers—because I am still a manufacturer—I would like to say this for my fellow-manufacturers; that though the original price at which the contract had been made was reduced so that in the aggregate there was a saving to the Crown of four millions of dollars, no body of men could have been fairer than the manufacturers of Canada in meeting the situation. In the matter of renewal prices, over which there is from time to time some muttering, because men will have their complaints and seek to convey the impression that all is not well, we have sought to interpret what was a just price. We have accurate knowledge of the actual costs in many of the establishments in Canada, we know what the prices are in the United States, and we have to the last detail particulars of the costs in Great Britain. This renewal business from time to time is fixed in price with one governing principle—that we may be just to the manufacturer in Canada and that we may be just to the Crown.

It is very easy to develop a spirit of anger against profiteering as it is very easy to develop a spirit of anger against a government. But why at this time? This much must be said for the manufacturer: he at least is devoting his energy and his time to the production of something that is absolutely necessary to

the state. Why have anger towards the manufacturer when you have none towards yourselves? What has been our position in Canada? Am I saying too much if I indicate that, on the whole, we have looked upon the war as an extra? Am I stating it too strongly if I say we are almost drunk with the prosperity which comes to us through the expenditure of immense sums of borrowed money and through the expenditure upon natural products of sums of money, because of the high price, that staggers every one who has to buy them? Is there evidence in this country of national sorrow and concern? God knows, some of you have paid, and some of your sons have paid the final penalty, and they are lying over in France or in Flanders. But, speaking broadly, as a people, is there sorrow? Is there any deep arousal of moral earnestness? Is it not "Business as usual", and profits larger than usual? You gentlemen who are in the Civil Service and by reason of it have fixed salaries will say that you pay a fair penalty in the increased cost of living without getting any increased return in your salaries, but I am thinking of the nation as a whole. Is there any deeply aroused feeling? Have you reflected that there is absolutely nothing in this conflict for us except what we take out of it in character? Have you reflected that before we get through with this job we shall probably find that annually thereafter we shall have one hundred million dollars of taxes to pay, in interest and sinking fund and pensions? And I think we may well ask whether a good deal of the anger which we profess to have against profiteers, and against governments and against those who are in actual position of responsibility, I think we may very well ask whether it is not a very flippant exercise after the most casual thought.

I had the opportunity of going to the Front. I know how easy it is to think that some experience you have will effect a permanent change, but it seems to me I never can look at life again as I did prior to the experiences of the last eight or nine weeks. You are startled when you get on the steamer with the returning soldiers, for no civilians are permitted to cross from Folkestone to Boulogne except those who have special permits—you are startled to have a sailor come to you with a life preserver and say, "Please put this on". You realize you are in the danger

zone. As you approach the Front you commence to see the signs of destruction, increasing in intensity. You see the amazing activity incident to these huge bodies of men and their requirements. There is a fascination about it that so commands you and absorbs you that you feel as though you would want to live twice as fast if you could, for the purpose of taking it all in. You see the men marching out who have been on duty in the trenches for forty-eight or seventy-two hours, and there is not one square inch that you can see from the top of the helmet to their heels, that is not plastered and covered with mud—the horses that are with them, from the back of their ears to their fetlocks, covered with mud, and they themselves presenting that drawn appearance of men that are overwrought, and many of them walking in the ranks while still they sleep from weariness; for these men fighting at the Somme when they are in the front line, ever exposed to danger, have no provision for sleep except that which they can secure by leaning up against the side of the trench. The only reason why they do not break down is because they are in magnificent physical condition. You see these men come out, platoon after platoon, and platoon after platoon of men marching crisply in to take the place of some who will come out at night, or come out in the morning, as we saw this group coming out in the morning when we were there; or you visit a dressing station and you see the conditions, as I did,—for 250 wounded men came in the night before from Beaumont Hamel, just in the valley below and up the hillside,—where because of the mud and the holes and the trenches and the barbed wire, matted and tangled, and the darkness, as many as forty men were used to bring in one wounded man; and you think of their suffering and their heroism, you think of the conditions under which they live without question—wet to the skin, no opportunity to change, three or four inches of snow on the ground, cold winds that would bite you through and through, or the next day teeming rain; and as I looked at them, tens of thousands of them, guns booming on every side and shells whistling over my head as they went on their dread message to the other side, this one thing came back to me again and again and again: My God! What have these men done? What have these men

done that they must be punished in this way, while you and I are at home, comfortable and easy, making money, living our lives? And I wondered, I wondered if we at home would realize what it meant to try to be worthy of it.

I went to see a boy two weeks ago last Sunday night. I had known him since he was a baby. I saw him last in our own office at home when he came to say good-bye to me—a fine, well set up lad of nineteen years of age—a gunner. And at Ypres, at the salient, in the dread days when we lost so many, this lad lost both his legs, both his feet below the knee. And when I saw him the other night what do you think he said: "I am proud to have you come to see me, Sir." My Lord! I felt as though I were not worthy to sit in the same room with the boy. What do you think he said? " 'Twas a great fight, Sir. 'Twas a great fight." And remember, only five days before, because the bone had not been very healthy, the lad had to have the leg cut off, well up in the thigh, after he thought he was getting through first-rate. What do you think he talked of? Of nurses, and of doctors, and of friends in the village; for there were flowers around the bedside, and fruits, sent in by the people in the little village who had heard of his case. Not one word of complaint did the lad make.

I ask you, gentlemen, I ask you in this Capital city, you who are judges of the Supreme Court, you who are Cabinet ministers, you who hold responsible positions, you business men and others, I ask you, do you mean to play a worthy part—to be worthy of these men?

You will remember that long ago, on a great day, a body of disciples waited for the return of their Lord, and when He came down from the mount and there was a poor unfortunate possessed of a devil, that they had not been able to exorcise, and when He commanded the devil and it came out of the man, they, in their amazement, asked "Why could not we cast him out?"—He said, "*This* kind can come forth by nothing but by prayer and fasting."

And, gentlemen, the principle laid down by the Great Teacher holds true in every simple thing in life, as well as every great emergency in life: it is costly to do a good piece of work. We

love our ease. Mr. Hazen, it is not true that we keep out of politics because they are dirty; it is true that we keep out of politics because we are not willing to pay the price,—we are not willing to put up with the discomfort, we are not willing to surrender our own ease. It is very much easier to pick up the morning paper, or after the business of the day is over to meet or gather together in dining clubs and talk about affairs. It is much easier to criticize those that do, and then sit back at ease and think we are virtuous because we are better than they are. It is not true. We are out of the serious things in life that matter, we are out of them because we have not the courage and purpose and sacrifice to go into them. Let us not humbug ourselves with idle ranting, for it is not true.

There are grave conditions in this country. We have extreme party spirit everywhere. I have lived in Ottawa for a year. I could not conceive of any condition where party politics were more bitter or more insistent than they have been in the official circles in the City of Ottawa during this last year, as if it were a horse race that was on in place of a great war in which the very life of the nation is in peril. We have to live together in this country. We have one-third of our community who are French Canadian people. We of British birth and British aspiration and British temper cannot sink them in the St. Lawrence and have them disappear. Nor can they—notwithstanding their viewpoint—nor can they live in a country other than with us. And God forgive us for either party strife or sectionalism or any other fault whereby we fail to help one another, to understand our mutual point of view and work one with the other for the common good of the state. And I would like to say—and, Mr. President, I am sure I am not abusing the courtesy or traditions of the Club (for all party spirit, and, I hope, a lot of other rubbish, have been burned up by those experiences through which I have passed) when I say that if a general election is held shortly, a racial cry will be inevitable and English will be pitted against French and French against English, and there will follow years of bitterness. Moreover, remember when the struggle of the war is over, the group of men who will sit around the table in council with the representatives from other Dominions to determine

what will be the future of this Empire will have to be a group of men chosen from this Dominion not by party guidance or by party methods, for it is inconceivable to me that a Government sustained by the vote of a section of this Dominion which, no matter for what reason or conscience, were unwilling to bear their share in this struggle would be permitted without civil strife to determine what part Canada should take in the Imperial Council which must follow the war. I bring to you, to whatever extent you will permit it, as serious a note as I am capable of indicating, that this great struggle, all the things that are involved in it, all the sacrifices that are being made by your sons and your brothers and your fathers, all that this Empire stands for, all that these people at home are suffering, call upon us to burn up the dross and to pray God that we may be wise and patriotic and truthful and heart-searching in our relations to ourselves, and that we seek above all to be right.

I thank you for your patience. I was brought up in an old-fashioned school. I have memories that neither money, nor power, nor place can provide. I have the memory of the passionate, unruly, masterful boy, brought into the little room in a humble home with an overwrought woman, who was my mother, and who taught me long ago that the way for deliverance from meanness and selfishness and wrong was to kneel before the throne of the Almighty and pray Him, as she used to for her boy, for a new heart. Gentlemen, may I urge, not as a better man than you are, but in the gravity of a situation where this nation is in the throes of a struggle to the finish that you will seek to remove everything that is mean, and nasty, and suspicious, and partisan that we may commonly serve. Our need is a spirit, not of fear," but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind." (Prolonged Applause.)